

Santa Rosa County
Emergency Services Advisory Committee
June 23, 2004
2:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Members Present:

Joe Diamond
Lew Oliver
John E. Reble

Chris Rucker
Tony Simmons

Members Absent:

Gerry Goldstein

Don Vanderryt

Staff Present:

Sheryl Bracewell
Deb Grinde

Dave Ling

Agenda for this meeting approved as submitted.

Minutes for meeting held May 26, 2004 accepted and approved as amended.

Presentation was provided by Chief Ken Perkins, Escambia County Fire Department. Chief Reble invited Chief Perkins as Escambia County has recently implemented a change within their county from entirely volunteer to a combination of paid staff augmented by volunteers.

Chief Perkins proceeded to say that Escambia County faced the same challenges as many other communities. The shortage of volunteers, due in part to the amount of training that is mandated by the state, the need for two income families and the fact that employers would no longer allow employees to leave their job to fight a fire led the fire chiefs to come to a decision regarding the shortage. They found that it became necessary to augment their fire emergency system, especially during the daylight hours. The volunteer fire chiefs made the determination to hire a Fire Chief to start in January 1999. The Fire Chief would be responsible for planning and implementing daytime firefighting with career firefighters. The funding for this project came as an increase to MSBU assessment fees that passed in the fall of 1999.

Career firefighters were placed on the streets of Escambia County in January 2000. The Fire Chief was pressured to get the career firefighters on the street as quickly as possible as the citizens were already paying fees for this service. The Fire Chief and his staff felt that a lot more planning was required prior to putting their plan in place. The need for standard operating procedures and guidelines was necessary in order to successfully introduce the career firefighters into a force that has been historically and completely voluntary. If there was a down side to this process it was the fact that the pressure to put the career firefighters in place, took precedence over the need to provide both groups with the tools necessary to perform their jobs. They are still recovering from the effects of this move, even to this day.

However, many good things occurred when this change was put into operation. The greatest improvement was the fact that the response times were much quicker. It created a healthy competition between the career firefighters and the volunteers. The volunteers made the decision to man their stations in shifts also. In many cases they have them manned for twenty-four (24) hours, especially on the weekends and at night when the career firefighters are not on duty. The purchasing has been consolidated and the inventory has been standardized to include gear, supplies, equipment and trucks. The training has become uniform and consistent.

The combination has many disadvantages. The majority of the firefighters are volunteers. There are approximately 320 volunteers and 73 career firefighters in Escambia County and so they are not all paid and they are not all volunteers. Decentralization of authority seems to be the biggest issue that needs to be resolved. The career firefighters must work with the people in the volunteer leadership positions already in place. Many times they are unable to determine who has the final say about the fire protection and this seems to be the one biggest issue that should have been resolved prior to the implementation of the paid firefighters.

They are currently entering into formal individual contracts with each of the volunteer fire departments. These contracts will clearly define what the county will be responsible for and what the individual departments will be responsible for. This will also help define the ownership of authority.

Chief Reble-Q Was there a clearly stated hierarchy or chain of command established?

Chief Perkins-A No, the lines of authority were largely not stated. That is part of the problem. The only things that the county is heavily involved in at this time are the purchasing and budgetary issues. Their private funds are their own, their promotions and board members are their own. The county will stipulate operation issues, training and education requirements for promotional issues and basic guidelines within the individual contracts. They are not deeply involved with each individual department's operation at this time.

Chief Reble-Q Does the county define the complement of officers and ranks for each station, such as how many and which ones they may have?

Chief Perkins-A The county firefighters receive stipend payments for recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. The stipend agreement dictates how many captains, chiefs, lieutenants and total number of officers is allowed.

Chief Reble-Q How much is the stipend?

Chief Perkins-A The scale was recently updated to \$150.00/mo per Firefighter, \$175.00/mo per Lieutenant, \$200.00/mo per Captain, \$250.00/mo per Assistant Chief and \$350.00/mo per Fire Chief. In order to receive the stipends they must respond to 25% of the first 50 calls, 12 ½% of all calls over 50 and they must meet all of the minimal training requirements including the state mandated Firefighter I and two (2) training sessions per month.

Chief Reble-Q Are the county firefighters required to respond to all medical calls?

Chief Perkins-A They respond to medical calls based on a criteria established with Escambia County EMS. The criteria is based on a combination of response levels and response times.

T. Simmons-Q Could you explain how your budget process works, how the MSBU funds are distributed, how the budgets are submitted, how it is generated throughout the county and then re-distributed?

Chief Perkins-A The MSBU is a countywide assessment. The residential rate is \$75.00 per year. The commercial rate is just over \$.02 per square foot. These funds are for fire protection services only.

Each fire chief submits a line item budget. All departments' budgets are combined and matched up with expected revenue by an executive committee. They review the needs of each department. The departments are separated into four categories based on volume of activity. Each receives a flat sum of money based on the category they fall into. Funds for capitol equipment and apparatus are based on a rotation and replacement basis. New equipment is brought in to the higher run departments and then the stock is rotated out to the lower run departments at the industry standard of fifteen (15) years. The effect of this plan is that the equipment will tend to be in better shape than it has been in previous years. The budget then goes to the county administrator for approval and then to the Board of County Commissioners for their approval.

T. Simmons-Q Do you find that any of the smaller departments tend to be under-funded?

Chief Perkins-A No, every department is well funded. There are no departments that are under-funded with this plan.

Chief Reble-Q Do the capitol items belong to the county?

Chief Perkins-A Yes, any of the items purchased with MSBU funds belong to the county. We still have some stations that have a few older items that still belong to them including a handful of trucks. These items were not purchased with MSBU funds. They will be eliminated by attrition.

T. Simmons-Q Does the county cover other costs such as insurance, fuel, etc?

Chief Perkins-A MSBU funds pay for all fire protection related articles, such as equipment, fuel, supplies, etc. The stations privately fund those items such as jackets and things of that sort.

J. Diamond-Q Requested a copy of the stipend schedule. How well do the two groups work together at a fire scene?

Chief Perkins-A He will not say that there aren't any "rubs" at all. They have been pretty successful in avoiding any altercations or legalities. However, on the scene itself there have been no major problems.

L. Oliver-Q Does any of this apply to the area within the city limits?

Chief Perkins-A No, this would only apply to the un-incorporated areas of Escambia County and the town of Century, which is incorporated.

Chief Reble-Q Do you provide fire services to Century on a contractual basis or only because they have no fire services?

Chief Perkins-A Only because they have no fire services.

J. Diamond-Q Do you have a mutual aid agreement with the City of Pensacola?

Chief Perkins-A Yes we do and I have been working on preparing mutual aid agreements. We should have one with Santa Rosa County, as well as other locations.

Chief Reble-Q Do your mutual aid agreements cover costs, are the costs broken out and do you attempt to charge fees based on your agreements?

Chief Perkins-A Our mutual aid agreements do break out the costs. We do not charge for our assistance as we would hope other agencies would not charge us if we needed help.

Chief Reble-Q If there are expenses incurred through a mutual aid agreement is there a mechanism to recover those costs?

Chief Perkins-A Our agreements indicate that costs incurred by your agency will be covered by your agency and costs incurred by our agency will be covered by our agency.

L. Oliver-Q How many of your facilities provide sleeping quarters?

Chief Perkins-A We have converted some areas to provide sleeping quarters at some stations. The stations that are being renovated at this time will have sleeping areas. Any new stations will have separate bunk areas for men and women. At this time about half of the stations provide sleeping areas.

C. Rucker-Q How many fire stations do you have? Are the career firefighters at the main stations?

Chief Perkins-A We have sixteen (16) main stations and five (5) sub-stations. At this time we have nine (9) stations manned with career firefighters and only two (2) are manned on a twenty-four (24) hour basis.

C. Rucker-Q What about any equipment or trucks that the volunteer departments may have purchased prior to the MSBU assessments went into effect? Would the individual fire departments continue to make the payments on the equipment or trucks?

Chief Perkins-A No, the county took over the responsibility of making the payments. In some instances the stations themselves were brand new and some of the fire engines were recently purchased. However, title to these properties stayed with the volunteer departments.

C. Rucker-Q Have you noticed any change to the statistics regarding the per capita fire loss since implementation in January 2000?

Chief Perkins-A There has been a decrease in the number of fatalities. However, we don't know whether that can be attributed to the addition of career firefighters. We have taken on the responsibility of fire inspections and have utilized the career companies to promote our fire protection programs including: in the schools, in the businesses, implemented a smoke detector program, have performed holiday safety programs and space heater programs. Space heater fires have been reduced by sixty percent (60%). There have been life saving incidents but the programs have also played a big part.

C. Rucker-Q Has there been any change to the ISO ratings in these districts to make a significant difference in insurance rates?

Chief Perkins-A The ISO has not been in to do a survey and they may only come in every ten (10) years for that purpose. Each of the fire districts have their own individual ISO rating. Upon direction of a consultant that was hired in 2001, we will be attempting to combine some of these districts. We hope to consolidate them into approximately three (3) ISO districts. We believe that will make a difference in the ISO ratings.

S. Bracewell-Q Were the fire stations actually built with the MSBU funds or the one-cent sales tax?

Chief Perkins-A The fire stations that have been built to date have either been built with private donations, which were donated prior to MSBU funding, or with MSBU funds. A fire station that is currently being designed will be built with the LOST money. We have used LOST money for the first time this year. We purchased a ladder truck for \$450,000.00. We have set aside \$1 million dollars for a training facility and \$1 million dollars for the new fire station.

C. Rucker-Q Is that how much a new fire station costs or is that a fancy station?

Chief Perkins-A This is a two-bay station that is not fancy.

Chief Reble-Q Are items like insurance, worker's comp, equipment insurance and any other insurances are covered by the county as a whole and not by the individual departments? And who provided the insurance for those items that are titled to the individual departments?

Chief Perkins-A The County takes care of everything with a blanket insurance policy, including those items that are titled to the individual departments.

Chief Reble-Q Did they always take care of this or has it only been since the inception of the career firefighters?

Chief Perkins-A I believe that the county covered it prior to the inception of the career force but I am not aware of how long ago.

J. Diamond-Q Are you self-insured?

Chief Perkins-A No, we are not. The county is self-insured, however, they have not elected to introduce us into that group policy. Our insurance is covered separately. I believe that we will be included eventually. Part of the reason that they are reluctant to include us is the issue of lack of authority or lack of control.

Chief Reble-Q Has there been any discussion of uniting all of the individual departments together as the Escambia County Fire Department, or is there too much tension that continues to prevent that from happening?

Chief Perkins-A We are still taking baby steps. There are some units that are in agreement but, yes, there is a tension built around their individual identities that still exists.

Chief Reble-Q Are there ever any instances where the volunteer crosses a career person or vice versa regarding the use of vehicles and/or equipment or any jurisdictional issues?

Chief Perkins-A Occasionally these types of things occur. We take these things on a case-by-case basis. They try to work things out amongst themselves. However, in order to be successful the career firefighters were aware that they couldn't go into this enacting those types of things. It is an integrated command and the same rank structure is utilized.

Chief Reble-Q Do you have Captains in the career ranks?

Chief Perkins-A Yes, we have one Captain and he is also our county training officer. The Lieutenants are the company officers on the trucks. We are aware that eventually there will be a station Captain and that person will be responsible for all three (3) shifts. We currently have four (4) Battalion Chiefs of which three (3) of them will soon be going to twenty-four (24) hour shifts. We have a Deputy Fire Chief and a Fire Chief. The District Chiefs will be reporting to the Battalion Chiefs. If, however, the District Chief takes command prior to the Battalion Chief's arrival, the Battalion Chief may or may not take over the command. In this sensitive area he should have a very good reason to do so. This will continue to occur during the transition.

Chief Reble-Q Would like to review the document that indicates how the transfer of command takes place on the emergency scene.

C. Rucker-Q How does the non-profit individual fire departments obtain their own money that they control?

Chief Perkins-A They would have fish fries, go door-to-door collecting donations and some would work the races at Five Flags Speedway in order raise funds for their own private accounts.

C. Rucker-Q Since the individual districts are able to select their own command staff, how can their training and skills be compared to those of a career firefighter?

Chief Perkins-A It is a very difficult situation at this time and different from department to department. However, as the new structure goes into effect, in order to receive the stipend at a particular rank, minimum requirements must be met. There will be a minimum training standard that will be included. Our hope is that the volunteers understand the need for that training and those skills and steer themselves toward those goals.

C. Rucker-Q How many receive stipends at this time? What percentage of the total number of firefighters are receiving the stipend? How many qualify in a month?

Chief Perkins-A Approximately 100 firefighters per month receive the stipend. We budgeted for about \$500,000.00 per year and are currently spending less than half of that at this time.

C. Rucker-Q Did you include the volunteers in making these determinations or did you just advise them of what would occur?

Chief Perkins-A They actually brought the solutions to us. Everything was based on their recommendations. We approved them.

S. Bracewell-Q Did you implement all nine (9) career departments at the same time? What criteria did you use to determine which ones you would implement first?

Chief Perkins-A We did implement all of them at the same time. The first ones to be implemented were determined by geographical needs throughout the county. Several things are taken into consideration beyond the geographical needs. Heavy call load during the daytime hours along with a lack of volunteers would indicate a need. Pensacola Beach has virtually no volunteer firefighters left.

S. Bracewell-Q Prior to putting the career firefighters in place, were you having a problem with districts not responding to calls? And if so, to what extent?

Chief Perkins-A It was a very big problem for us especially during the daytime. It was actually labeled a crisis situation. We will be adding a 24-hour station in Perdido Key after October, the start of the new fiscal year. We selected Perdido Key because it is a high-risk area due to all of the new high-rise buildings.

C. Rucker-Q Has anyone ever disagreed with or seemed to be upset that some areas pay quite a bit for fire services and the next district over may have a staffed station?

Chief Perkins-A I have never received a single phone call to that effect. We do not have enough funds to staff every station. We are trying to provide close to the same level of protection throughout the county.

C. Rucker-Q How many square miles does Escambia County cover? And what is your annual budget?

Chief Perkins-A Escambia County covers approximately 620 square miles and our budget is at about \$10.2 million dollars.

C. Rucker-Q Is your minimum staffing level on your fire trucks two (2) or four (4) firefighters?

Chief Perkins-A We are very adamant about putting four (4) firefighters on a truck in order to comply with the "Two In-Two Out" mandate.

C. Rucker-Q How much more would it cost Escambia County to staff all fire stations at a full time 24/7 level?

Chief Perkins-A After studying and reviewing our needs it has already been determined that an additional \$10 million dollars, for a total of \$20 million dollars per year, would bring the county to a bare minimum level and that would still be relying heavily on volunteers. The career firefighters would be anchoring the stations and the volunteers would be supplementing the districts.

S. Bracewell-Q How many stations are also used as EMS posts?

Chief Perkins-A There are 3 or 4 stations that the EMS personnel use occasionally.

S. Bracewell-Q At what medical training level are the career firefighters?

Chief Perkins-A All of the firefighters, whether career or volunteer, are first responders. The career firefighters are offered incentive pay of \$1,500.00 for becoming an EMT and incentive pay of \$3,000.00 for becoming a Paramedic. Some locations also have ALS first responder training.

S. Bracewell-Q Do the fire services and EMS share the same medical director?

Chief Perkins-A Yes, and all training and procedures are the same for fire services and EMS.

Chief Reble-Q Would a career firefighter wait to see if a volunteer firefighter responds to a medical call or would they take the call immediately?

Chief Perkins-A There is a set of criteria established in order to determine whether the career firefighters will respond immediately or wait for a volunteer to respond. Career firefighters will be dispatched to structure fires, MVA, codes, etc., along with the jurisdictional volunteer district.

Chief Reble-Q Do you have standardized orders for residential fires or commercial fires regarding which apparatus (and how many of each) will be dispatched and do you limit initial response to the first alarm?

Chief Perkins-A Yes we do have standardized orders. We will call out additional companies starting with the jurisdictional company and then the next closest department depending on what the response is to the initial alarm.

Chief Reble-Q Do you ever have instances where you have too many apparatus on the way to you?

Chief Perkins-A That does not happen very often. We seldom have more than what we require!

No questions from the audience for Chief Perkins.....

Review of Reports/Statistics

Reviewed Analysis of Emergency Calls Report for the month of May 2004.

Noted that there are still a few departments that continue to have double-digit "No Response" percentages and that, in a few instances, other districts have covered calls. Chief Reble also requested that committee members try to think of ways to reduce these numbers.

L. Oliver was advised that the statistics are for the fire districts. The information at the bottom of the report indicates the call volume and responses by EMS (Rural Metro). Short discussion held regarding the response times. L. Oliver also noted at this time that Midway entertained a 67% increase in medical calls over the previous month. S. Bracewell indicated that the summer season has an effect on the districts in the south end of the county. We have noted an increase of six (6) EMS calls per day covered by Rural Metro over last year.

L. Oliver questioned where the Rural Metro post moved to, that was previously located at 5080 Gulf Breeze Parkway in Midway.

James Chalmers, Rural Metro, advised that one of the units was moved to the Gulf Breeze Hospital Medical Complex and the other was moved to Manatee and Sunrise at Holley By The Sea. J. Chalmers explained the reasons for the changes and S. Bracewell explained the mechanics of this move.

Fire Hydrant Reports

Have received three (3) additional reports from Midway, Holley/Navarre and Berrydale districts. We have received a total of five (5) reports to date.

Correspondence

None

Old Business

Notification of New Development/Hydrants

S. Bracewell has been working with county staff to try to make some improvement to the fact that the fire departments are un-involved with any new development that occurs within the county. S. Bracewell advises that the fire departments will receive a copy of the final plats. The plats will indicate the street layout, the width and length of the streets, the street names, the hydrant locations, dead ends, access restrictions and other items spelled out in the land development codes. Upon final approval by the county commissioners S. Bracewell will forward a copy to the appropriate fire departments.

S. Bracewell participates in a county addressing committee and is able to address any concerns that the districts may have at a preliminary stage. If any of the fire districts have any suggestions for improvement, recommendations or concerns she will be glad to take these issues to the committee for review. She has also been in contact with B. Faulkenberry, Planning and Zoning, and stated that Ms. Faulkenberry will be more than willing to work with the fire districts to address any of their questions or concerns, including any recommended changes to the code.

New Business

Dave Ling, Emergency Management Director, has been requested to bring to this committee different aspects of emergency services. This would include several supporting agency groups, their roles as a part of emergency services and how they might interact with other agencies within the county. The ESAC committee should become more familiar with these various groups, including their operations and capabilities. D. Ling will contact some of the people at Search and Rescue and possibly another group to make a brief presentation to this committee at our next meeting. Chief Reble indicated that this may also provide some of the emergency personnel with a different perspective regarding rescue vs. recovery. D. Ling added that upon arrival of the Search and Rescue team, the emergency response people are relieved of recovery duties for those longer periods of time in order to be available for their emergency response activities. Chief Reble believes this will be beneficial to this committee.

PUBLIC FORUM

Richard Collins, 8600 Chumuckla Hwy

Requests that during future meetings extra copies of the Analysis Report be available

Has been attending Planning & Zoning meetings and learned that 90% of the growth is being planned for the west portion of Santa Rosa County; there are 19,000 acres soon to be put on the market by International Paper Company and approximately 90% will be located between Pace and Jay. The Chumuckla water system claims to be able to handle the growth, however there is no funding available for operational costs at this time. Discussion followed regarding the problems to the area.

Introduction of and welcome to Fire Chief Steve Demeter, Midway Fire Dept.

Meeting recessed and reconvened at 4:44 PM

J. Chalmers approached the committee to wish Rick Schuster, cameraman, a happy birthday!

Meeting adjourned at 4:43 PM

Next meeting Wednesday, July 28, 2004

Submitted by D. Grinde